# I-93 Improvements

Salem to Manchester, NH

**UPDATE**
November 2001
Volume II

# History and Project Status

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**EIS Phases I and II Completed**

**EIS Phase III Underway**

Interstate 93, is an important transportation corridor between the greater Boston metropolitan area and the New Hampshire communities in the south central part of the state.

This 18-mile section of I-93 between Salem and Manchester has not been substantially reconstructed or widened since it was first constructed as a 4-lane highway in the early 1960s. Passing through the five communities of Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester, this stretch of I-93 serves as New Hampshire's main street for thousands of everyday commuters, and is a gateway for a myriad of visitors to New Hampshire's Lake's Region and the North Country.

Today traffic volumes along I-93 are in excess of 110,000 vehicles per day (vpd) in Salem (south of Exit 1) and will increase to 140,000 vpd by the year 2020. With a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd, motorists traveling along the I-93 corridor currently experience traffic congestion and substantial delays. In addition, this congested nature of the highway makes it less forgiving and consequently less safe than it could be.

## Study Process

To address the deficiencies of the corridor, the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) has undertaken a preliminary design and an environmental evaluation of alternatives and impacts within the framework of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS process follows five phases (noted on the right of this page). The project has made significant progress since the first public meeting was held in March 2000. Phases I and II of the EIS have been completed, and Phase III is well underway.

## Documentation

The documentation of the information developed for Phase I of the EIS is contained in the *Scoping Report* published in May 2000. For Phase II, the *Rationale Report* was published in January 2001. The *Scoping Report* provides an understanding of the project purpose and need, an overview of environmental resources and existing conditions, and a discussion of project issues and alternatives to be considered. *The Rationale Report* documents the development, evaluation and screening of conceptual alternatives identified in the *Scoping Report*.

Copies of both Reports are available in municipal offices and public libraries of the five communities through which the corridor passes. In addition, these documents as well as meeting minutes and project schedule can also be reviewed on the NHDOT's website, Http://webster.state.nh.us/dot/10418C/default.htm.

## Current Efforts

The Development of the EIS in now in Phase III – Evaluate Alternatives and Prepare the Draft EIS. In accordance with recommendations in the Rationale Report.

## Study Phases & Schedule

**Phase I** **(Complete)**
Establish Project Purpose and Need, Catalogue and Evaluate Existing Resources, and Define Range of Alternatives,

Scoping Report published May 2000.

**Phase II** **(Complete)**
Develop and Screen Conceptual Alternatives.

Rationale Report published in January 2001.

**Phase III** Evaluate Alternatives and Prepare Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

To be published in March 2002

**Phase IV** Public Hearing
12/01 to 08/02

**Phase V** Prepare Final Environmental Impact Statement

04/02 to 12/02

**Final Design**

1/03 to 06/06

**Construction**

03/04 to 09/10

Current Efforts (cont.)

on-going study efforts involve consideration of the following alternatives:

- Widening I-93 to be three lanes in each direction for the entire length.
- Widening I-93 to be four lanes in each direction for the entire length.
- Widening I-93 to be four lanes south of Exit 3 and three lanes north of Exit 3 in both directions.
- Constructing park and ride lots at Exits 2, 3, and 5, and enhance the Exit 4 park and ride as appropriate.
- Expanding existing bus service to Boston with stops at Exits 2, 3, and 5 as well as Exit 4.
- Enhancing bus service by providing service between New Hampshire's existing and proposed park and ride lots and the employment centers along I-93 in northern Massachusetts.
- Utilizing Intelligent Transportation System Technology (ITS), such as variable message boards, highway advisory radio, etc.), and improve upon incident management capabilities to reduce congestion associated with accidents or incidents.

In addition, Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Transportation System Management (TSM) measures are being considered.

The TDM measures might include employer incentives and disincentives to encourage people to not drive alone; to drive during non-peak hours; to telecommute; etc.

The TSM measures would include short term, localized improvements to address immediate safety concerns and capacity improvements where possible, such as creating double-left turn lanes at the Exit 3 NB off-ramp for traffic accessing NH 111 WB, thereby reducing the backup on I-93.

Alternatives not being considered further as part of addressing the needs of this segment of I-93 include:

- Constructing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, as there will not be enough users in those lanes to warrant building and maintaining those lanes. If Massachusetts were to build an HOV lane, then perhaps an HOV lane in NH would be given more thought, but based on evaluations at this time the lane would be underutilized.
- Instituting rail service as part of this project. Ridership on any rail service would not diminish the need to widen the highway. However, given that rail service will in all likelihood be required in the future if NH is to maintain the level of mobility that is expected today, It is proposed that any widening of I-93 be done in such a manner as to retain the room for the possibility of a rail line in the highway corridor sometime in the future.

Other issues or initiatives of interest that are taking place as part of, or in conjunction with the I-93 project Include:

- Evaluating a bike trail as part of the transportation corridor of I-93 and how that bike path might connect to the proposed park and rides as well as the local and state highway system. A larger study of the north/south biking needs from the State Line to Concord, will incorporate findings relative to an I-93 bike trail with consideration of using abandoned rail corridors and roadway shoulders along other state and local roadways
- Developing wetland creation / enhancement sites as mitigation to offset impacts to natural resources. Currently, one site is under construction and another under design. Additional sites both within and outside the corridor will be evaluated.
- Coordinating with Massachusetts relative to their 11-mile study for I-93 in Methuen and Andover where there is consideration to replace the shoulder being used as a travel lane with a 4$^{th}$ travel lane to the NH / MA State line.
- Coordinating with Massachusetts and with the Congressional Delegation in an effort to conduct a more global study of the transportation needs of the region served by I-93 from Boston to Manchester. The study would concentrate on long-term needs and focus primarily on transit options. Having Massachusetts as a partner would allow for a more detailed discussion of the feasibility of the various transit alternatives.
- Incorporating Incident Management techniques for the NHDOT, NH State Police and the local safety officials to address accidents along I-93 in a more timely manner to minimize delays to motorists.

Secondary Impacts

Another issue of importance is the consideration of secondary impacts. The environmental agencies who are responsible for the oversight and eventual permitting of any construction feel strongly that the improvements to I-93 will result in substantial secondary impacts to natural resources. That is, by widening I-93, New Hampshire will become more accessible, which entices more development of homes and businesses, which in turn impacts natural resources.

To address to what degree and where these secondary impacts might occur, the Department, at Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) urging, is utilizing an Expert Panel to evaluate the issue. A panel of experts in the fields of land use, economics, and the environment will answer questions relative to what the future might hold if I-93 is widened or not widened.

The Expert Panel will provide their evaluations individually and independently through an iterative process.

The result, hopefully, is that some consensus or a range of possible scenarios can be provided to the environmental agencies and to the people of New Hampshire on the implications of widening I-93.

**DELPHI or Expert Panel Meeting held in Manchester to begin the process to consider potential Secondary impacts which may occur as a result of widening I-93.**

## Public Involvement

Public input and direction is key to the success of the project. Since March of 2000, numerous meetings have been held with local appointed and elected officials and the public to discuss all aspects of the project. To supplement this effort an Advisory Task Force (ATF) was formed to provide continuity to the public participation program and another forum for input. In all several dozen meetings have been held in the communities along the corridor to better understand the needs, issues and concerns of each of the communities and stakeholders.

The most recent round of Public Informational Meetings concluded on September 6th at the McLaughlin Middle School in Manchester. At each of the meetings (one in each of the five corridor communities) presentations relative to the various highway options specific to those communities were discussed with the public and stakeholders.

In addition, in cooperation with the various State and Federal Regulatory Agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, NH Department of Environmental Services, Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Authority, and others, the NHDOT continues to hold Resource Agency Meetings for the I-93 project in Derry late in the afternoon so that the public has an opportunity to participate. To date 16 Resource Agency meetings have been held with the latest meeting being held on October 17th where the preliminary engineering and resource impacts along the corridor were discussed.

## Stakeholder Feedback

A range of issues and desires for the I-93 project have become evident with more than 40 meetings having been held with the State and Federal agencies and the corridor communities.

The Resource Agencies appear to recognize the need to widen I-93 and correct the deficiencies associated with the existing infrastructure. The agencies however, also feel that serious studies relative to the rail service need to begin today given the long lead-time involved in instituting rail service.

A synopsis of the feedback that has been heard from the public at the various local meetings has focused on the need to:

- Begin widening construction as soon as possible.
- Minimize impacts to private properties.
- Construct sound barriers to screen and shield neighborhoods.
- Construct 4-lanes now in each direction and not 3-lanes.

The individual towns have also expressed particular concerns relative to how the project affects their communities.

For Salem a primary issue has been that the project not exacerbate the flooding that occurs in the Town and within the Spickett River watershed today.

For Windham and Salem, a predominant issue has been the need to address Water Quality and the highway runoff, especially with Canobie Lake and Cobbetts Pond located adjacent to the corridor.

Windham is also very much interested in ways to reduce the overall footprint of the highway and the Exit 3 interchange. Today the existing median between the NB and SB barrels at the Exit 3 interchange is as much a 1,200 feet wide. Windham would like to see the interchange look more like Exit 2, 4 or 5 with much smaller footprints.

In Londonderry and Salem, the neighborhoods have expressed concern about the proposed park and ride lots and the impacts on their quality of life. Various alternatives or means of minimizing impacts are being considered.

## Whats Next ??

The NHDOT is currently working on the documentation for this project, which includes publication of the DEIS. This process involves quantifying impacts related to both the 3-lane and 4-lane alternatives along with each of the associated interchange options. Each alternative will be described in detail, with corresponding impacts documented for comparison of alternatives. The Department will then review all of this information and identify the "Preferred Alternative(s)" and publish the DEIS.

The publication of the DEIS signifies the end of Phase III for this study. Under Phase IV, the Department will present the "Preferred Alternative(s)" at a Public Hearing and solicit public comment. The Department will then review and address all of the stakeholder comments, as appropriate, and will proceed to the fifth and final phase of the study, which includes preparation of the final study documentation or the FEIS.

**For more Information…**

Contact Jeff Brillhart, NHDOT

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**Reports and Project Meeting Minutes…**

Visit NHDOT and the I-93 Project On-Line @ http://webster.state.nh.us/dot/index.htm

# Upcoming Phase III Meetings

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**November 15, 2001**
**5:00 PM Open House**
**7:00 PM Presentation**
Salem High School, Salem
Public Informational Meeting
*Alternative Layouts and Impacts*

**November 19, 2001**
**5:00 PM Open House**
**7:00 PM Presentation**
West Running Brook Middle School, Derry
Public Informational Meeting
*Alternative Layouts and Impacts*

**November 20, 2001**
**5:00 PM Open House**
**7:00 PM Presentation**
Windham Middle School, Windham
Public Informational Meeting
*Alternative Layouts and Impacts*

**November 27, 2001**
**5:00 PM Open House**
**7:00 PM Presentation**
Londonderry High School, Londonderry
Public Informational Meeting
*Alternative Layouts and Impacts*

**November 28, 2001**
**5:00 PM Open House**
**7:00 PM Presentation**
McLaughlin School, Manchester
Public Informational Meeting
*Alternative Layouts and Impacts*

**December 5, 2001**
**9:00 AM Presentation**
**and Discussion**
Final Expert Panel Meeting on
Secondary Impacts
UNH Auditorium
400 Commercial Street
Manchester, NH